

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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NOVEMBER, MCMXXXV

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DRAMA

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By G. W. Bishop

IN "Romeo and Juliet" Shakespeare set producers a difficult problem. Juliet requires extreme youth and at the same time great technical experience; Romeo calls for impetuosity and even recklessness and also a gift for speaking some of the most exquisite verse in the language. How are the "star-crossed" lovers played in Mr. John Gielgud's production at the New Theatre? If Mr. Laurence Olivier could have set his performance to the authentic Shakespearean music we might have hailed the finest Romeo of our time. He is often very moving; he is always intensely real, and he discovers an ecstasy of grief in certain passages, but only rarely are we caught up in the magic of the poetry. Miss Peggy Ashcroft's Juliet is of a lyric quality: eager, touching and always very beautiful, but she fails to plumb the last depths of passion—as the ideal Juliet must do.

The best performance comes from Miss Edith Evans as the Nurse, so good in fact that one felt that the part is as satisfying a portrait as Shakespeare ever drew. Mr. Gielgud's Mercutio prepares us for the excitement of his Romeo at the end of the month. His production is an ingenious mixture of the Elizabethan stage and the triple setting for "The Old Ladies"; it enables the tragedy to move swiftly and preserves in a remarkable way the place element.

Last month there have been two German actresses in leading parts—and Miss Lucie Mannheim had the better luck. Bruno Frank's comedy, "Nina," in Mr. Hubert Griffith's adaptation, is a vehicle stars dream of, seldom find, and can rarely act as well as Miss Mannheim when they do turn up. She

plays a dual part so well that at the opening performance at the Criterion dozens of weather beaten first-nighters were taken in. It is an effective piece of virtuosity.

Miss Grete Mosheim may or may not be as fine an actress. We have yet to see, for at the St. James's she appeared in a lame affair by Mrs. Alice Campbell called "Two Share a Dwelling"—in which a Jekyll and Hyde theme is given an unconvincing rational basis—and plays a young woman whose inhibitions occasionally take the form of violence and licentiousness. It is impossible to judge the actress from her performance in this poorly constructed drama.

Mr. James Bridie's new comedy, "The Black Eye" at the Shaftesbury, is so exuberant that it flows outside the picture stage. It is possible that if the talented Scotch dramatist had exercised more restraint that he would have given us a better play, for there seems no urgent reason for the young hero's naive explanations to the audience. Nevertheless, the piece is so witty and so full of life that it is ungracious to cavil at detail. I enjoyed nearly every moment of it, from Mr. Frank Pettingell's all-too-short opening scene as the bibulous songster to the final curtain. Mr. Bridie has written a modern fairy tale in which the younger son sets out—in a way that is at once traditional and oh! so untraditional—to save the family fortunes. His "fairy-godmother" is a Jewish exconvict and their adventures are almost as fantastic as those of Jack on his beanstalk. The play is beautifully acted by Mr. Stephen Haggard, Mr. Ralph Roberts, Miss Jean Cadell, Mr. Morland Graham and by everyone in the long cast.

Mr. Walter Hackett also moves in a world

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

of fantasy. In "Espionage" at the Apollo he takes the realistic setting of the Orient Express and fills the sleeping car with spies, politicians, violent patriots, customs officials and waiters who are really detectives. Into this whirl of adventure wanders Miss Marion Lorne, fluttering and bewildered, to find herself the centre of intrigue in the realms of high diplomacy. An engaging young man gets past the frontier on her double passport; they are both suspected of murder—and so on, and so on. It is the mixture very much as before—thrills and fun and Miss Lorne.

Twenty four years ago "A Butterfly on the Wheel" set the fashion for court scenes. London playgoers were harrowed by the spectacle of the innocent young wife in the divorce court at the mercy of her husband's merciless counsel. In the revival at the Playhouse the cross-examination holds the attention, thanks to Miss Greer Garson and

Mr. Franklin Dyall, but the interest is now academic. The tale is of the theatre and even then not too well told. Frankly young Mrs. Admaston, who received the co-respondent at midnight in the flimsiest of "nighties," seemed to ask for all she got in the way of legal proceedings.

For really bright fun I can recommend Mr. Bobby Howes, Miss Vera Pearce and Miss Bertha Belmore in the latest musical comedy, "Please Teacher," at the Hippodrome, and if you can fancy Sheridan to music there is "Rivals," transferred from the Embassy to the Kingsway.

Unfortunately I missed two of the best things of the month: "Peer Gynt" in Mr. Ellis Roberts' new metrical translation at the Old Vic (which has now given place to "Julius Caesar"), and Mr. Sydney Carroll's revival of the old Otway comedy, "The Soldier's Fortune" at the Ambassadors'.

MOSCOW THEATRE FESTIVAL

1935

By Lewis Casson

NO other city in the world could organise a festival such as that at which we have been assisting at Moscow. London and New York could come near the quantity but without the system of permanent companies and nightly-changing repertory which is almost universal in Moscow the special quality of performance, its immense variety and the announcement of a definite programme months ahead would be impossible to either city.

Not that the standard of performance was universally high. The range of quality was very great. Take, for instance, the three musical pieces. In our Drama League party the opinion was unanimous that Shostakovich's opera, "Katerina Ismailova" (known in English as Lady Macbeth of Minsk) was one of the three most beautiful and thrilling performances of the festival. The story told us a newspaper paragraph would be banal and even sordid, but acted with a sincerity I never imagined possible in opera, sung magnificently by the whole cast, but especially by People's

Artist Leschinskaya, with the best orchestra we heard in Russia playing a score of enormous emotional power, it was raised to the greatest heights of tragedy. The settings, of a fairly realistic type, but excellent design, were of great help, the last scene on the road to Siberia being especially effective. A revolving stage was cleverly used, the steep slope of the house yard and the river bank being used as the ceiling of the interiors. The lighting and grouping, and the movements of the chorus were perfect in every detail. Yet this performance was not in the company's own theatre—it was what we call a "one night stand" of a tour. It was one single night's offering in a Workers' Club, in an industrial district of outer Moscow, a week which was completed by plays of Ostrovski, Goldoni, and another opera—by various companies. In what other country could such a thing be imagined?

On the other hand the other two musical productions, Rimsky-Korsakov's "Sadko" and

MOSCOW THEATRE FESTIVAL

one of the latest ballets, "Three Fat Men," at the Bolshoi, the 100 year old traditional opera of Moscow were both distinctly disappointing. Given as much money, most European opera houses would do as well, and probably better.

Though they show great differences in their record of achievement, I may perhaps group together the offerings of the Jewish National State Theatre and the State Gipsy Theatre, because both were, no doubt, shown us to point out how the Soviet Government is striving to develop the culture of its many nationalities each on its own lines, instead of trying to force them into one groove.

The Gipsy Theatre show was a naive, semi-amateur affair. The settings music and dancing were characteristic and charming in a simple way, the acting quite amateur.

The State Jewish Theatre performance was a very different matter. There we had a highly organised and sound company, headed by a very experienced and accomplished actor, People's Artist S. Mikhoels.

I am told that in their own plays they do very original and effective work. But they elected to appear in Shakespeare's "King Lear," produced by Radlov, the fame of whose "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet" and "Othello" had already reached England.

I should like to have been able to join in the chorus of praise this production has received, but I am afraid I cannot. Mikhoels gave a very fine display of the actor's art, but he seemed to me entirely mis-cast. He is quite a little man, with a mobile, slightly simian face, little natural suggestion of dignity, and none of splendour. The tragedy is surely the breaking of a great man, not a mere study in senility. Lear was a man in the prime of life who tried to evade the responsibilities of kingship while retaining its privileges. To show the failure of that enterprise is good propaganda. To make Lear a fool, just because he was a King, is not.

The Fool of Honoured Artist V. Zuskin was excellent and deserved a Chaliapine as Lear to play against. The rest of the cast seemed to be floundering and uncomfortable in strange surroundings. The Edmund was played as an effeminate, the Kent without humour, and Edgar only caught fire twice; in the scene where he changes to Poor Tom, and for a few moments in the storm. I could not have believed the awakening scene

could be played without drawing tears from the audience, but this production achieved it.

A revolving stage was used and the lighting and effects were excellent.

The score was good, very modern stuff (far better than that provided for "King Lear") well played by an orchestra of 22, a large number than any but the biggest London theatres can afford.

The whole staff of the theatre, company, teachers, orchestra, stage-staff, numbers nearly 100. The organised childrens' games in the foyer between the acts were very enlivening, as also the catechising to which Miss Satz submitted on her work in the theatre.

The other Childrens Theatre was at the Bubnov Institute, which is a sort of research station used to assist the Training Colleges for Art Teachers. The theatre is only one of its many departments, and caters for audiences of children from 12 to 15.

The play we saw was "Free Flemings," a historical drama on the Tyl Eulenspiegel legend, treating Tyl as the leader of a people's revolt against their Spanish conquerors and the Inquisition. It was a most exciting affair, very simply and directly told, very sincerely and vividly acted by an excellent company. (The juvenile V. S. Magula was one of the best we saw). There was nothing obviously childish about play or production, but its straightforwardness made it the very thing for older children.

Honoured Artist Natalie Satz is getting quite world-famous, so our hopes ran high before the curtain rose at her Childrens Theatre, and we were not disappointed. The fairy opera "The Fisherman and the Fish" founded on a story of Pushkin's seemed exactly right as an entertainment for little children and the children in the audience seemed to agree. It was clearly and humourously told, and much helped by the old Nanny who sat in a corner, as Chorus, knitting and receiving the comments of such characters in the play as desired to soliloquize. She also vividly directed our straying attention to any significant action in the play we were likely to miss.

The opera was well sung by a very competent professional company, mostly in the twenties, and I was much struck by the standard of dancing, miming and even acrobatics that was expected of them. The sets, very lively and jolly in a Caran d'Ache manner, and the costumes broad and effective.

MOSCOW THEATRE FESTIVAL

I am going to put the Second Moscow Art Theatre production of "The Spanish Curate" in a class by itself, because in my opinion it was by far the best thing we had seen up to then, and only one later production approached it in the whole Festival. The Second Art Theatre has no theories of production, indeed it is said to have broken away from Stanislavski because he tended to standardise too much both the type of play and the style of production of all plays. We had most of us read "The Spanish Curate," some of us believed it would turn out amusing. Many of us had seen Sunday night performances of the lesser Elizabethans, but I think none of us were in the least prepared for such a rich, ripe, glowing recreation of a full-blooded time and climate. The story never flagged for one instant. Every characterisation was strongly marked, "round" and larger than life, at any rate than the life of to-day. All the men were real men, and the lovers were played with a delicious humour that kept sentiment in bond to comedy.

The two old rascally priests, Lopez and Diego, were played with such gorgeous Rabelaisian gusto that they became intensely loveable. Surely such humorous leg-pulling is better propaganda against an unsound religion than any number of anti-God museums.

The costumes were carried with all the swagger and panache of the period, yet worn and used, as if they had always been lived in. The whole production showed how tradition and inspiration in acting can bring to life plays which have preserved no tradition of their performance.

It was generally the custom to go round during or after each performance and meet the director, but only in the case of Natalie Satz and Bersenev of this theatre did we get much out of it. We spent a most interesting half-hour questioning Bersenev on the running of the theatre and he was most delightful and instructive. Their plays are rehearsed from 3 to 4 months, and only four plays a year are added to the repertory. The designs for the scenes are made after rehearsals are started, and discussed during the early rehearsals. Essential constructional scenery is provided as soon as the 'round the table' discussions are over. There are no understudies, as they could not dovetail in with the company. If anyone is ill, another play is substituted. Some of their plays have been in the repertoire for 21 years. After a lapse

of some months, one rehearsal only is enough to restore it to the bill, owing to the thoroughness of the original rehearsals. At the last rehearsals the whole company is present, whether in that play or not, and all are expected to offer criticisms.

The next two productions can be grouped together, "Aristocrats" at the Realistic Theatre and "Fighters" at the Maly, are both examples of the new Soviet Drama. Neither is supposed to be directly propagandist, but both extol the Soviet system, and the motives and drama derive entirely from problems which are topical and therefore dependent on the Soviet regime.

"Aristocrats" is a good, but rather naive and shapeless play. It concerns the reformation of a band of wasters, pickpockets, prostitutes and sabotaging engineers, who have been condemned as criminals to work on the Baltic Canal construction. Its moral showed a deep trust in humanity and its essential goodness, and a more Christianlike view of the doctrine of forgiveness than official Communism would seem to encourage.

One had been provided with so much high-brow jargon about the Realistic Theatre's methods of production that one came somewhat prejudiced for or against it. In essentials, all it seemed to amount to in this case was the use of very small-scale acting (except in one case of violent and crude over-acting) and the use of two platform stages set among the audience, so that it might be near enough to make such small-scale acting effective.

No scenery of any description was used, but draperies on the main walls of one corner of the building, changed occasionally for atmosphere. Modern spot-lighting, generally used alternately on one platform and the other, but sometimes on both at once. Uniformed property-men, assumed to be invisible in the Chinese manner. Except in the case of some snow thrown by the property man, and a shaken black sheet with holes in it for a river to be seen, and a little furniture, the actors had to depend on their own acting to create their scenery and atmosphere.

This particular play seemed to me to gain nothing by this method of production, except the rapid alternation of short scenes of varied locality.

The acting, though more than competent, was not remarkable. In most cases the characterisation was not strong enough, and there seemed to me not enough 'magic' in the



THE OPENING CHORUS FROM
 "THE DANCE OF DEATH" BY
 W. H. AUDEN. AS PRODUCED
 AT THE WESTMINSTER (GROUP)
 THEATRE BY TYRONE GUTHRIE
 AND RUPERT DOONE.

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SPRING THE FINE
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TROY
GIANT
Horse
OF SINON.

The Siege and Capture of Troy, from the
Establishment of the Trojan City, to the
Surrender of the City, and the
Slaying of the Trojans.

Chariot
RACING!
45 Highly Trained
STEEPS.

STUD OF
Wild Zebras
AND THROU OF
Fairy Ponies!

TROJAN
Circus!
Water Arena.

DYING
Gladiators!

LIVING
AND DYING
PHOENIX!

PROCESSION
And Entree
Giant Horse

The Entrance of the Horse
into the City of Troy.

REAL
Zebras
The Entrance of the Horse
into the City of Troy.

THE SIEGE



THE
Scenes
CIRCLE

Cupid
SOOT-BAG!
A New & Improved Act by the TROJANS.
The Fox Hunter!

Ducrow
AND
Miss WOOLFORD
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Fisherman
Naples,
Market Girl
PORTUGAL.

GREAT
German
FRIDAY

Lodoiska
FOREST
Astropol

Castle of Lorinski
A COURT CARD WITH
Horticulture and Private Room.
A Court Ball of the Trojans, and
Visible Entrance of the Trojans.

THE LAST MEYNE
A Court Card WITH
Horticulture and Private Room.
A Court Ball of the Trojans, and
Visible Entrance of the Trojans.

BLAZING
Turret!
Floriska's
STEED

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MOSCOW THEATRE FESTIVAL

acting to compensate for the helps to illusion they had abandoned.

The next evening was Ostrovski's "Storm." Here again we touched the heights. Like "The Spanish Curate" the play is now a classic. A period and way of thinking different to our own have to be created, and this was done to perfection. Every character was alive and individual; the author, producer and actors had worked together so faithfully to serve their art and humanity, that one had a god-like sympathy with everyone, and was most deeply moved.

The Kamerny Theatre "Egyptian Nights" was the last performance we saw. Tairov is one of the most famous of the new producers, and his productions have been so much heralded, and the preliminary patter about this show was so eulogistic, that again we possibly expected too much.

The play itself is hotch-potch. The Sphinx scene (with Caesar's speech cut to nothing) and two following scenes of Shaw—then a scene which is composed almost entirely of one long poem of Pushkin's (not too thrillingly recited), followed by Enobarbus' barge speech. The rest a truncated version of Shakespeare's "Anthony and Cleopatra." The only attempt to blend the mess is that Cleopatra retained her childish mannerisms throughout, and was therefore much too young. The acting was quite mediocre. People's Artist Alice Koonen as Cleopatra was artificial and mannered, and failed in suggesting passion in love or anger. The men exceedingly wooden. The Romans especially slow, dull and heavy.

On the other hand, I have nothing but praise for the settings, which were simple, but solid and satisfying, and full of suggestion. Colouring, grouping and lighting beautiful. Prokofiev's music was beautiful and full of atmosphere.

It was a great disappointment that we were not given an opportunity of seeing anything of Meyerhold's work. The result was that, while we saw the finest work of the old school, we did not see the most famous and reputedly the best of the new. We are therefore left with the impression that nothing has yet shaken the pre-eminence of the Stanislavski tradition, which even thirty years ago was leading Europe. It is noticeable that the three productions we all found most satisfying were "Katerina Ismailova," "The Storm" and "The Spanish Curate," which are all directly or

indirectly off-shoots of the Art Theatre. One cannot help feeling that this is due in a large measure to the tradition of *service* that Stanislavski stood for; the belief that the artist's duty, whether he is author, producer or actor, is to do his own job to the best of his ability; not to worry about interesting, exciting new methods of production or writing, or about showmanship; above all to *do*, instead of talking about doing. The amount of pure twaddle poured out in the introductions to the synopses that were given us was enough to drown far better work than we saw.

One evening was devoted to a visit to a Park of Culture and Rest, to see an outdoor display of amateur music and Dancing in the Green Theatre, which is an open-air stadium holding 25,000 people. We had seen but little of the Park (which is something between Wembley Exhibition grounds and Coney Island) before the rain came on and drove us into the Culture departments, which consisted of rather dismal displays of industrial statistics, posters and literature in melancholy pavilions, until our own display was marshalled for us in the Childrens Theatre, another rather gaunt structure.

It was very disappointing for the amateur performers, as well as for us. They had organised a capital show of country dancing and some amazing amateur acrobatics by factory workpeople. In spite of the delays and hindrances, we all thoroughly enjoyed it. Out of doors it would have been thrilling.

Taking the festival as a whole, perhaps the most noticeable thing is that the Moscow Theatre has taken it entirely in its stride, an extraordinary testimony to its abounding vitality and variety. We saw certain selected performances of the opening fortnight of the season's regular offerings that is all. Some of the work was good and some not, and the audiences seemed to me to re-act to this much as English audiences. If they are interested, they are still; if they are not, they are restless, and no amount of high-brow eulogies will convince me that work which is obviously not holding the audience is good theatre.

Two very noticeable features of the Theatre are the eagerness of the audience to patronize every variety of work, and the enthusiastic support the State gives to the theatre as a most valuable and necessary instrument of culture. The Government's policy is not only to spread

MOSCOW THEATRE FESTIVAL

the theatre's influence as widely as possible over the whole enormous country, not only to bring it to the very doors of everyone, but also by its lavish encouragement of experiment, even at a heavy loss, continually to make the theatre a better instrument.

For this very reason one of the things the theatre needs most is continuous and severe criticism, to distinguish real merit from clever showmanship. There seems to me far too much indiscriminate eulogy and too much tendency in some quarters to estimate artistic merit in proportion to the content of conscious propaganda of the new gospel. I am sure it will be fatal to encourage this tendency. No dramatist who is interested in social affairs

can entirely hide his views and prejudices, but his conscious aim should surely be study of human beings and their presentation as perfectly as possible in perfect dramatic form.

The Soviet Theatre has a greater chance and a greater responsibility than any theatre has ever had before. It has a magnificent tradition and a wonderful array of artists—and the enthusiastic backing of the Government. I hope it will prove worthy of these things: but I fear lest the very rapidity of its expansion, the desire to get immediate results, and the striving to do something startlingly new and original, may lead it to miss something of its enormous opportunity.

THE RELIGIOUS TRAIT IN WELSH DRAMA

By The Rev. E. Ebrard Rees

THERE is a world revival in drama. Other things may slump and decay. Literature we are told is not up to the ancient standards; religion does not get deeply into the hearts of the people as was once the habit; commerce and trade have struck a bad patch. But drama is being born again. And not in some countries. There is a new drama movement in Russia as well as in Rome, in Iceland as well as in Ireland, in Wales as well as in South Africa.

Although English plays are being performed in Germany and Sweden and Spanish plays in England and Wales, and although there appears to be an internationalism of the stage that is very real in the fact that some playwrights can always draw huge crowds in countries other than their own, there is also a national movement of drama in most countries that is peculiar.

English drama in the main is detective and triangle-love-affair in its theme. It depicts suburbia in its life and moods. Russian drama is communistic in purpose and plot. Each nation has a type and it would be easy to distinguish between an Irish drama and a Spanish even if we knew nothing about the authors or the play before we read it.

Thus we see in the new Welsh drama

movement something that is very peculiar to Wales. It is not a copy of that of any other country but is cutting for itself a new highway into the life of the community and maybe into the life of world drama.

In the vanguard of the Welsh drama movement are two societies—one of Trecynon and the other of Swansea. The former of these recently opened the first Little Theatre in Wales while the other is concentrating on Welsh plays exclusively. Common to both is the fact that they are inspired by the churches. Instead of the drama being taboo as was the case for so many centuries, the churches are now giving it most of the support that it gets. The leader of the Trecynon Dramatic Society is a minister in the person of the Rev. E. R. Dennis. Throughout the Principality one finds the same thing. Churches give birth to dramatic societies; they support them; they give the players and the producers; they organise drama weeks. It would not be too much to assert that the new drama movement in Wales is a handmaid of the churches. Not only is it a means of keeping the young people employed with good recreative ambitions, but also it helps to finance the churches in return. A census was taken of the churches in one of the South Wales valleys the other

THE RELIGIOUS TRAIT IN WELSH DRAMA

day and it was found that more than half the churches had dramatic societies under their aegis. In case it be thought that every church is hand and glove in this drama movement let it be said quickly that there are dozens of churches which still regard drama as the work of the devil. And that's that. But the fact still remains that the churches are the sponsors and patrons and supporters of this new drama movement.

Whether it is because of this support or not it is a significant fact that modern Welsh drama is religious in its theme and purpose. The average play has the chapel and the church as a background. Wherever the plot begins it comes to religion sooner than later. The hero turns out to be a leader in some church or shows strong Christian qualities which triumph in all kinds of difficulties. It would be difficult to appreciate a Welsh play from the angle of the audience unless there was this religious motif running through it.

One cannot foretell where this new movement will walk to and what company it will keep when it gets a bit older and becomes of age, but so far all the Welsh playwrights have kept to the interpretation of some Christian quality or the attacking of some quality that is not Christian from the Church and Chapel standpoint. On this ground Welsh drama has been criticised very bitterly by certain English critics that it is puerile and that the Welsh playwrights are not playwrights of any standing. But what matters for Wales is that the movement is gaining tremendous ground every year, and last winter has shown better plays, better acting and more societies than ever before. And the general effect is the bringing of life into a closer touch with the churches and the Christian religion.

Perhaps the future will give Wales the opportunity of bringing to drama a religious flavour that will save drama from the accusations that it always caters for the base in life and lives on "leavings." In the meantime, there seems to be offering an opportunity which the Welsh churches cannot afford to let slip.

GROUP THEATRE AT THE WESTMINSTER

"THE DANCE OF DEATH"—W. H. AUDEN.

"SWEENEY AGONISTES"—T. S. ELIOT.

The production of these two dramatic poems held so much of interest and instruction for the producer that, leaving aside for the moment a consideration of the poetic 'come-back' to the theatre which shows every sign of imminence, we will pass on rather to a consideration of the production itself.

In the first place as to merits; there was vitality; tremendously vigorous high spirited enjoyment, effectively sweeping away the barriers between actors and audience; less—I would suggest—by the use of expressionistic technique than by the fact that the lines having been written by a poet, did with true poet's magic come alive upon the speaker's lips.

Now in having the good fortune to live at a time when poets write for the theatre, notice that it is the words, however outwardly commonplace, which set the actor alight. Self-conscious and over-clever production must now recede into the background, for it is no longer required to carry the play,—as I have seen it sometimes successfully and legitimately do in "Gas" and other good plays in the Expressionistic mode. But direction must be there and particularly in regard to timing and pace, for as we saw in this case, slowing down may spoil even such good stuff as Mr. Eliot's "Sweeney Agonistes" which I also venture here to say was over cleverly produced. There were also in the second play *longeurs* in pace which at times threatened to empty the play of its content, and solo dances trembling upon the verge of egotism should have great care only to hold up the action to the maximum tension and never beyond it. On the other hand such a complete nulifying mistake as the rendering of poetry as elevated language and with emotional content extraneous to the words themselves was here avoided by a producer wise enough to be strict in this matter—and in fact I have reason to believe that he never suggests their lines to the cast as other than memorable speech. Of this all producers of Mr. T. S. Eliot's work would do well to take note—in particular and especially in dealing with over emotional women.

Another point is worthy of any producer's notice—It is of no use to build as o-called apron stage if, not even in order to plug a good song, is anyone going to venture upon it. There is always a tendency in shy and inexperienced actors to avoid coming right down stage. But in the opening scene of the "Dance of Death" they all did so, thus bringing their audience for a time into a sense of delicious and almost alarming participation.

Speech and business we saw should never be placed as it were end-to-end. There seemed for instance no reason why the carrying in of chairs and tables could not and much more comfortably have overlapped with the announcer's call to those 'lonely and sick.'

But finally we discover that faults are of incomparably less importance than achievement. This production for all its faults may prove epoch-making—high praise for an experimental production but undoubtedly deserved and obtained from a gratefully exhilarated audience who were also at least half aware of having witnessed the slaying by Mr. Auden of their dragon 'Highbrowism.'

E. L.

The Young People's Social Club, Tulse Hill, have just produced "Bird in Hand" by John Drinkwater. They would be glad to give a performance of this play to any organisation in or near London desiring it. Application should be made to Miss Amy Choyce, 1, Brockwell Park Gardens, Herne Hill, S.E.24.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
 INCORPORATING
 THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

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WE are able to make in this number a brief allusion to the Annual Conference of the League which was successfully held at Stratford-upon-Avon from October 25th to 27th. Over one hundred and twenty delegates assembled, and the standard of speaking throughout was unusually high. The Chairman reminded those present that the League may be said to have been placed "on the map" as a result of its first Conference which was held at Stratford sixteen years ago. Many of those early hopes have been realised, and now once more Stratford has witnessed the beginnings of a new enthusiasm for the League as an instrument of dramatic progress on every side of theatre work. The Conference received generous hospitality from the Mayor, who held a Reception at the Town Hall on the Friday evening; and again, we must thank the Governors of the Stratford Memorial Theatre for the use of the Conference Hall adjoining, and above all Sir Archibald Flower to whom is really owing the invitation that the Conference should be held at Stratford this year.

The British Drama League "Playlover's Diary" published in co-operation with Messrs. Charles Letts is now ready, and is specially commended both to the attention of individual members and affiliated societies. Besides the ordinary Engagement calendar, the diary contains a Foreword by Miss Marie Tempest; a directory of the principal organisations of national scope; a list of repertory theatres, dramatic schools, and dramatic agencies in London, and a section of legal information dealing with such questions as the Licensing of Stage Plays and Theatres, the Law of Copyright, Entertainments Duty, and other kindred matters. There is also a full glossary of stage terms, and pages for a register of plays seen during the year. The ordinary cloth-bound edition is published at 1s. and an edition-de-luxe in leather wallet with pencil is available at 3s. 6d. Affiliated Societies wishing to order the diaries in bulk may purchase them at the rate of 9d. per copy for the 1s. edition, and 2s. 6d. for the 3s. 6d. edition; but these must not be sold to the general public at less than the published price. Any Society contemplating the sale of these diaries among its members may obtain specimen copies on application. The diary forms a perfect Christmas gift for all play lovers.

It has come to our notice that trouble has recently been experienced in regard to the production of an unlicensed play in a hall licensed as a theatre. The play had been published in book form, and those responsible for its production naturally took it for granted that the play had received the Lord Chamberlain's license. This, however, proved not to be the case, and the performance had to be scratched at the last moment. This incident shows that the publication of a play in book form should not be taken as evidence that it can be presented on the stage, and Societies are advised, in all cases of doubt, to assure themselves that the play has, in fact, been licensed. It would be helpful, if Publishers of plays which have already been licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, would intimate the fact on the fly-leaf of each copy. The omission of such a note would be a warning to those desiring to produce the play, that they should first enquire whether the play is yet free for public performance.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

- "If I Remember Right." By Sacha Guitry. Translated by Lewis Galantière. Methuen. 12s. 6d.
- "Drama in School." By George H. Holroyd. Allan & Son. 3s. 6d.
- "Dramatic Verse." Selected by R. L. Mégroz. Pitman. 2s. 6d.
- "Speech-Training and Play Production in Schools." By Lilian Cornelius. Allan & Unwin. 3s. 6d.
- "Youngheart and Other Plays." By Lilian Cornelius. Allan & Unwin. 3s. 6d.
- "Plays for Girls and Boys." By Lilian Cornelius. Allan & Unwin. 3s. 6d.
- "Accent on Youth." By Sampson Raphaelson. Gollancz. 5s.
- "The Wizard of Menlo." By Edmund Konrad. Adapted from the Czech by Paul Selver. K. S. Bhat. 5s.
- "Bloody Mary." By Derek Walker-Smith & Giles Playfair. Chapman & Hall. 3s. 6d.
- "Three for Luck." By Mabel Constanduros. Chapman & Hall. 3s. 6d.
- "Land of Plenty." By Harold Holland. Crossway Press. 1s. 6d.
- "Nothing Venture." by Harold Godwin. Gordon Harbord. 2s. 6d.
- "Eight New One-Act Plays of 1935." Edited by John Bourne. Lovat Dickson. 3s. 6d.
- "Seven Short Plays for Amateur Societies." Edited by John Bourne. Lovat Dickson. 3s. 6d.
- "More New Plays for Boys and Girls." Edited by John Bourne. Lovat Dickson. 2s. 6d.
- "One-Act Play Parade." Selected by Sydney Box. Allan & Unwin. 5s.
- "Circumstantial Evidence." By George H. Grimaldi. Deane & Sons. 1s.
- "Created He Them." By Charlotte Bacon. Deane & Sons. 1s.
- "Stratagems." By F. Austin Hyde. Deane & Sons. 1s.
- "Maid's Judgement." By Margaret Ashworth. Deane & Sons. 1s.
- "Death in the Dark." By Harris Deans. Frederick Muller. 1s.
- "Seven for Sylvia" by Lydia Havers. Frederick Muller. 1s.
- "The Pilgrim's Progress." Arranged by G. Winifred Taylor.
- "Jack and the Beanstalk." By Herman Ould. Oxford University Press. 4d.
- "The Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe." By Herman Ould. Oxford University Press. 4d.
- "Hansel & Gretel." By Herman Ould. Oxford University Press. 4d.

NO matter what form they take, the memoirs of so distinguished a play-wright and actor as M. Sacha Guitry are bound to be interesting, and one opens "If I Remember Right" with the lively anticipation of one more plunge into the fascinating theatre world, this time all the more fascinating because it is the theatre world of another nation. The book proves to be entertaining enough, but the last chapter, called "Random Memories" might well describe the whole, which as an autobiography suffers from many omissions. We learn a fair amount about M. Guitry's childhood, and of his views on schooling (it is pleasing

to note that the most satisfactory school was run by an Englishman!); we learn a little about his later life and struggles, we follow him on an American tour, and then the book peters out with various anecdotes, mainly of famous men such as Mussolini, Clemenceau, Monet. It seems ungrateful to cavil at so amiable a volume (which, because it is so essentially French will be eagerly devoured by many readers whose actual views and experiences are profoundly alien), but it seems a pity not to learn more of M. Guitry's later work, of his apparently inexhaustible activities in most branches of the theatre. Possibly this is due to modesty—the book is undoubtedly modest—but we could do with fewer anecdotes (most of them more amusing to the French mind than they will be to the English) in order to improve still further our acquaintance with a brilliant personality.

Mr. George H. Holroyd's "Drama in School" describes the methods and means by which this very important factor of modern education can be introduced and developed. The book is full of excellent common-sense and considerable knowledge; our only regret is that saten is mentioned as "an admirable cloth," that the idea of presents handed to the performers is countenanced at all, and that the short chapter on lighting leaves the problems of dimming unsolved. There are some very jolly illustrations, but the selection of suitable plays and books at the end is unsatisfactory. "Dramatic Verse" consists of passages from Shakespeare and his contemporaries chosen for verse speakers by Mr. R. L. Mégroz. It covers the period called, somewhat loosely, Elizabethan, and, in addition to well known speeches and scenes, contains examples of less familiar material.

Three of the volumes in this month's list are by Miss Lilian Cornelius. They consist of a theoretical book and two collections of plays. Of the three, "Speech-Training and Play Production in Schools" is the most interesting. The authoress not only expresses herself with delightful clarity, but the wisdom which comes from practical experience is manifest in every chapter. In "Youngheart and Other Plays" the sincerity which has gone to the making of these religious and morality plays demands respect—although, as far as drama is concerned, edification is not always enough. The "Plays for Boys and Girls" are varied in style and treatment, and have, no doubt, proved useful for school work. Miss Cornelius does not shrink from technical problems, but the notes which accompany all the plays show how simplicity can govern the most difficult production. Even then, skilful training must have been required to make some of these plays effective when tackled by youngsters.

This time there are more full-length plays than usual. The long introduction to Mr. Sampson Raphaelson's "Accent on Youth" tells us that the play is illuminating, urbane and witty. There are people who will fully agree with this; the play has all the waywardness which Mr. Coward has made fashionable (without, however, Coward's penetrating humour), but, despite the skill with which they are manipulated, we, for one, have no particular wish to meet any of the characters again. "The Wizard of Menlo" from the Czech of Edmund Konrad, sets forth, with the help of a great number of characters, the amazing achievements of Edison, the inventor. It is always interesting, but,

RECENT BOOKS

considering the material at hand, should be more than this. Possibly, the reason why the play fails to reach greatness is because what underlying purpose there may be, is not insisted upon with the starkness characteristic of similar plays in modern Russia.

Historical plays are rarely satisfactory, and it cannot be said that Mr. Derek Walker-Smith and Mr. Giles Playfair's "Bloody Mary" sheds any new light on a singularly unfortunate reign. The maids-of-honour speak of "Harry Arundel, Billy Paget, Fruity St. John," etc., and this idiom, although scarcely novel, might have been amusing if consistently adopted. But the major portion of the play is modern only up to a point, and the characterisation, although not full blooded enough for the old type of historical drama, is scarcely subtle enough for the new. Naturally, "Three For Luck" by Miss Mabel Constanduros, presents a considerable contrast. It is as simple and sunny as the historical play is dark and fore-boding, and its slightly involved complications and lightly sketched-in characters lend themselves to a mild and genial type of humour. The unstressed sincerity and skill with which the appalling conditions of a workless household, living on the dole and almost bereft of hope, are presented in "Land of Plenty" by Mr. Harold Holland, compel respect and attention. Unfortunately, the author mitigates his effects by too careful writing; at times the characters express themselves with the punctiliousness of an essay. If a producer modified this tendency, translating many of the speeches into a more natural idiom, a fine and striking play would ensue. The chief merit of Mr. Harold Godwin's play "Nothing Venture" would seem to be that it was produced at the "Q" Theatre and is now published. Thus far something has been won, but very little is ventured in the play itself. Neither plot nor characters are particularly stimulating—and, as far as reading is concerned, the habit of underlining every key word becomes a positive torment before the book is finished.

Mr. John Bourne's "Eight New One-Act Plays of 1935" is one of the best known of play anthologies. Its appearance is something of an event, as, up to now, each volume has contained one or two plays which have been fairly widely discussed and performed. It is interesting, therefore, to speculate on the fate of the plays in this issue—interesting but fruitless. For Mr. Bourne, with, as ever, an eye on the unusual, has collected together eight plays of which at least seven will arouse divided opinions—Mr. Bourne's own amusing trifle being but a drop of honey on the tongue, and not before it was time after the unrelenting gloom of Mr. Laurence Housman's "Judge Lynch," the study of revengeful madness in Miss Cicely Louise Evan's "Antic Disposition" or the pathetic blindness of the human puppets in Mr. A. J. Talbot's "Set Fair." The names of Mr. Ivor Brown and Herr Ernst Toller add lustre to the book; although, in the latter case one hardly knows which of the three gentlemen concerned causes the greater surprise—the translator, Herr Toller, or the gallant Cardinal who originally devised the story. "Seven Short Plays for Amateur Societies" have been selected with the requirements of villages specially in mind. In consequence, there are more parts for women than for men and the Editor states that there "are no cocktail parties... psychological discussions or arty-crafty experiments." There are certainly no cocktails, but Miss Olive Popplewell's overlong "Vision" is both psychological and experimental, and, presumably, "The Voices" by Mr. Walter

Dierix is also experimental; anyway, it calls itself a fantasy and can be left at that. In the present writer's opinion "One Must Go On" by Mr. George W. Y. Porter is the most distinguished contribution to the book, which contains one more play proving that Lush is not yet exhausted as a holiday resort for dramatists. "More New Plays for Boys and Girls" is an excellent volume. The plays are fresh and simple to perform, and one is outstandingly original. This is "A Star Fantasy" by Miss Elizabeth Lewis; it combines both humour and a beautifully handled nativity motif. The Editor's own play is one of several delightful frolics in a book which includes, no doubt wisely, somewhat longer plays than usual.

"One-Act Play Parade" consists of twelve new plays selected by Mr. Sydney Box. It has as its chief feature "The Forest of Happy Dreams" by the late Edgar Wallace, an exciting episode, but many of the other plays are of equal and sometimes of greater value. Considerable variety is to be found in the book from the thoughtful "Prisoners and Captives" of Miss Ann Allardice to the melodrama "The Cellar Door" by Mr. R. Elwyn James, or the psychological excitement of "The 300th Performance" by Mr. Stephen Barnett. Some of the best, "The Illusionist" by Mr. Philip Johnson, "Created" by Miss Lal Norris, and the ably constructed thriller "Five at the George" by Mr. Stuart Ready, deal with the supernatural, and two of the three lighter plays are genuinely amusing. A better book than usual.

There remains some one-act plays. "Circumstantial Evidence"; exciting and rather horrible play, neatly constructed. "Created He Them"; one more slum play of devastating misery. "Stratagems"; a mildly amusing rural scene. "Maid's Judgement"; a well-written incident of the Monmouth Rebellion. "Death in the Dark"; grimly arresting. "Seven for Sylvia"; a play for women which we regretfully classify "typical." "The Pilgrim's Progress"; a brief but excellent rendering of the great morality. The three plays by Mr. Herman Ould "Hansel and Gretel," "The Old Woman who lived in a Shoe" and "Jack and the Beanstalk" are simple, directly written plays for schools and children in general.

IMAGES BY MARGARET LEONA.

On Sunday September 22 at the Rudolf Steiner Hall, Miss Margaret Leona, assisted by Miss Helga Burgess, gave an experimental Recital of fragments of poems and plays of all periods and countries. Miss Leona explained, by a note on the programme, that this Recital was to show what a wide dramatic field her particular stylised work could cover. And certainly it did. In Miss Sitwell's poem "Thoughts on the Variety of Human Aspirations," Miss Leona and Miss Burgess were delightful, and Miss Leona's rendering of "La Beauté" a Beaudelaire poem, was impressive and original. The most enjoyable item on this varied programme was a recital of "A Fragment of the Song of Solomon," in which the soft timbre of Miss Leona's voice gave colour to the beautiful words of the Bible. A special word of praise is due for the imaginative costumes, which were fully effective against a curtain setting.

J. R.

PLAYING TO CURTAINS

HOW can we provide scenery for a series of plays at a minimum cost?" is a question which members of amateur Dramatic Societies frequently ask each other, and the answer is, "Buy or make some good stage curtains." A draped stage will serve for an infinite number of scenes, and curtains are essential to cope with the numerous changes of scene in Shakespeare.

Although curtains commend themselves first on the grounds of adaptability, they also lend themselves to very beautiful effects. If they are carefully hung the graceful folds can be made very pleasing to the eye, and provide a more charming background for the play than indifferent scenery of a realistic type.

Lights played from the wings to catch the folds of the back curtain will give a number of beautiful fluted effects, and when this device is used the scenes may be treated symbolically. A forest of fairy-like beauty may be suggested by playing a green light on the curtain from both wings, and if a blue or pink light is substituted on the one side an interior will be suggested with a background of beautiful and impressive pillars.

The choice of the colour of the curtains is an all important question. Where several sets can be made or purchased it is easier to solve. Then a light set, a dark set, and a patterned set is the usual and most satisfactory solution. Patterned fabrics need to be chosen with special care. The pattern should not be obtrusive, but should provide for the eye a restful background for the action. Suitable designs will generally be found in reproductions of old tapestry patterns.

Where only one set is possible, the successful choice of colour and shade will depend on a number of factors. Considerations like the colour scheme of the hall, the intensity of the lighting system, the size of the stage, the types of plays to be presented, and the costumes to be used, will all have to be weighed. Black is perhaps the most successful where a single set is the only possibility, particularly if the material is velvet. This has the effect of increasing the apparent size of the stage enormously. The only type of costume which does not show up against it is black, and as entirely black costumes are not often called for this is not a serious disadvantage. Where only one set of curtains may be had, it is a good plan to line them with material of a different colour. The lining side may then

be used as an alternative if the hanging arrangements are neatly carried out.

The hanging cannot be too well done for the success of a play set within curtains depends to a great degree on the way the curtains are hung. They should be hung just clear of the floor, and have sufficient generosity of material to allow them to hang in graceful folds, and to overlap to exclude any light which may be behind them. They must be kept properly taut, and are best suspended by a hook and wheel device on flat steel or brass runners. Stout steel wire may be used where it is not possible to fit the more permanent strip runners, but coiled spring wire is a trap for the unwary, and should not be used. It is designed for domestic curtains of considerably lighter weight than stage curtains, and if it is used for stage work the runners are liable to stick at inconvenient moments, and if the coiling expands the appearance of the curtains is spoiled or else they collapse altogether.

The curtains need to be carefully looked after if the best is to be got out of them. They should be dry cleaned periodically and neatly folded when they are packed away. Whoever is responsible for sweeping the stage should be warned not to tie them in knots to raise them from the floor during sweeping operations as this unkind treatment reduces even the most beautiful hangings to crumpled rags.

From the producer's point of view it is very gratifying to realise what a wide range of effects can be obtained when one set of curtains is the only background available. That they may be hung in folds and subjected to pleasing variations by lighting has been indicated. They may also be hung straight, and borders or silhouettes fastened on them. These additions may be cut out and coloured quite easily, and once the knack of getting broad poster like effects has been acquired, it is surprising what curtains and cardboard may be transformed into.

The actors must be properly familiar with the curtain entrances and exits, which should be clearly defined and few in number. Nothing destroys the flimsy illusion of the play's background so easily as for the audience to see an actor "fluff" his exit, and after grabbing at the unyielding curtains in several places, make an undignified exit into the wings by diving underneath them.

NORMAN BRAMPTON.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON FESTIVALS

By Arlecchino

MR. JOHN BOURNE'S article in a recent issue of "Drama," "An Adjudicator has his Say," has no doubt produced a flood of comment. I should like to offer some very obvious and practical suggestions for meeting some of the difficulties.

The Drama League and the Community Festivals are supplying a real want in our national life. The growth of the League has been so rapid, it may be said at this juncture to show signs of growing out of its clothes. The remedy is not to stop giving it Oxo, but to increase the measurements of its garments.

I think three facts emerge very clearly from last year's festival:

1. Adjudicators are overworked and unnecessarily harassed.

2. The Festival cannot be both a social event and a competition. If it is to continue as a competition, it must be organised on that basis and every possible incentive to partiality removed.

3. Plays entered should first be judged *as Plays* before being put on the stage.

Measures are long overdue for the Prevention of Cruelty to Adjudicators. Mr. Bourne's article reveals a terrible state of affairs, not, as he says, that these things often happen, but that there should be a possibility of their happening at all. Surely the remedy lies with the Drama League. Festival entries show a steady increase. The demand for adjudicators rises yearly. It is for the Drama League to state, not only on what terms, but on what *conditions* they are prepared to supply this demand. Hours of work should be clearly defined; all attempts at "influence," direct or indirect, frustrated by "neutral" hospitality, either in a good hotel or with someone unconnected with the society. All information regarding the teams should be rigorously excluded and as far as possible names should be suppressed. Competitions for play-writing are conducted anonymously. Why not for play-acting?

Privacy during the performance should be insured by the provision of a judge's box. Any stage carpenter could fit up a kind of closed-in pew, where the adjudicator could

work undisturbed and without disturbing others by his light.

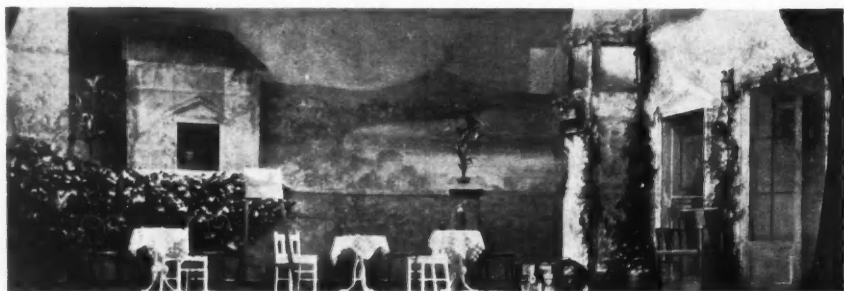
Five plays and then an adjudication is a ridiculous amount to attempt in one evening. Programmes should be cut down to three plays and an adjudication, which gives an equivalent in entertainment value to four plays. If possible a short period might be allotted to producers to explain difficulties they have met with and ask advice about their solution. A short conference after the adjudication is often very valuable. "Baiting till one a.m." can only be detrimental to all concerned.

We need more adjudicators or more intermediate rounds. An adjudicator who has to send up one play out of a total of 70 is bound to develop the elimination complex. He must approach his work, not in the spirit of "What latent talent can I find here?" but "What plausible reasons can I give for rejecting the sixty-and-nine?" A Festival can never be a festival in the true sense of the word while there is all this emphasis thrown on the winning play, while the "also-rans," however near, must be consigned to the scrap-heap. The adjudicator is faced with the task of consigning to oblivion sixty-nine plays out of 70, and he has also to try and win the sympathy of the audience for his decision. This offers a strong inducement to criticism of the slashing variety, and ends in throwing juicy scraps to the newspapers, who can be relied on to do their worst with any adverse comments. I wish all adjudicators could begin their speeches with an appeal to the press to report them absolutely verbatim or not at all.

Adjudicators need far more practice in working together on panels and in establishing common standards. Why couldn't they all be taken to a West-end production and made to mark the play and then thrash out their differences until some uniform standard was reached? And how are they trained for their job? Should not each fully-fledged adjudicator have attached to him some young apprentice who is learning the profession from actual practice in the law-courts, so to speak? A good actor or a good author is not thereby a good adjudicator.



TOBIAS AND THE ANGEL ON
THE BANKS OF THE TIGRIS.
SCENE DESIGNED BY HAROLD
HEMINGWAY FOR THE RECENT
PRODUCTION BY THE CURTAIN
THEATRE, ROCHDALE.



SET FOR "SEE NAPLES AND DIE"
BY ELMER RICE. PRODUCED BY
THE REPERTORY CLUB, PERTH,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON FESTIVALS

We need a play-reading service; the establishment within the Drama League of a permanent panel of accredited judges whose verdict will carry conviction. Plays entered for Festival work could be submitted to them, and the marks for Dramatic Endeavour awarded then and there. (Why must a team go the whole length of producing and acting a play before it can be told with any authority, "You are wasting your time on that stuff"?)

In this way adjudicators would be spared the confusion of having to decide on the merits of a play when their proper work consists in judging the acting and production; teams would be saved from wasting their time on rubbish; new work and the work of local playwrights would be independently assessed; a good original play, ruined by faulty production, might be rescued from the scrap-heap; and something might be done about that recurring tragedy of our festivals, the new play which does not quite succeed in being a play, not altogether bad, but muzzy in outline and

obscure in intention. This is a case where a word in season might save a good deal of heart-burning later on.

If the adjudicator were not so overworked, he would have time to distinguish between that which was bad because it has not yet learned to be good, and that which was bad anyhow. He might also have time to remember that his work at Festivals is not so much to eliminate teams as to help along those who wish to learn: and that if we all knew as much as he does, there would be no point in asking him to come.

This used to be much more the attitude of the adjudicator until a rush of overwork caused him to take arms against a sea of troubles. Life could be made more pleasant all round by giving him less to do and more time to do it in. And if it all means more money, what of it? The public pays more readily for its hobbies than it does for its daily bread. The Drama League is a healthy child. If it is growing out of its "claes," it obviously needs newer and bigger ones.

SHAKESPEAREAN SETTINGS FOR SMALL STAGES

By Robert G. Newton

THERE are two main approaches to Shakespearean production which, for convenience rather than accuracy, we will label Traditional and Experimental. The basic difference between them is that the former attempts to create a contemporary background, whilst the latter attempts to re-create the matter of Shakespeare's plays, as if seen through modern eyes. The productions of Mr. William Poel are typical of the former method, whilst some of M. Komisarjevsky's recent experiments at Stratford are typical of the second. For many reasons both these approaches, unless handled by artists of integrity and sincerity, are likely to savour of precocity. In the case of the former the theatre may be sacrificed at the expense of Shakespeare; in the latter Shakespeare at the expense of the theatre. I am, therefore, going to suggest a compromise. That, I know, will be taken as a sign of weakness by many, but I can not help feeling that for amateurs at any rate it will lead to a greater

appreciation of Shakespeare in the Theatre than either of the two more extreme approaches already mentioned.

In spite of the fact that this article is on Shakespearean settings rather than Shakespearean production, a few words on that subject are necessary. As I have said, over and over again, one of the essentials of production is that the producer expresses the convention or conventions in which the play is written. Now the Shakespearean formula differs fundamentally from that used at large in the commercial theatre of to-day. It is non-realistic, which means that it is not bound by verisimilitude, and can therefore slip easily from one extreme to another—from melodrama at one moment to farce the next. The producer's plan for production will have to be very plastic, especially so, as the changes of locale are as sudden and as violent as are those of convention; the action may take place on a blasted heath one moment and in a Banquet Hall the next. The Shakespearean

SHAKESPEAREAN SETTINGS FOR SMALL STAGES

formula has another important characteristic. The Elizabethan theatre was, if nothing else, an actor's theatre: it demanded that the imaginative powers of its actors should be expressed in invention and colour rather than in characterization and naturalism. The Elizabethan stage was much more histrionic than realistic: each scene was valuable more for its dramatic content than for any development of character or exposition of theme.

From the above it should be evident that Shakespearean settings have, in the first place, to be flexible, so as to allow for swift changes of convention and changes of locale; in the second place they have got to help the actor as actor. The traditionalists are in favour of reconstructing the Elizabethan stage as accurately as possible. There is much to be said for this. From a producer's point of view it was an admirable construction allowing of great variety in grouping, locale and acting areas. But the theatre has changed since the sixteenth century; the influence of lighting and of scenery has left its mark upon the theatre-going public. There are, nevertheless, some interesting deductions to be made from the study of the Shakespearean stage and its structure. The modern introduction of the apron stage, an adaption of something Elizabethan, is a feature well-known to all classes of theatre-goers. The really interesting thing about the original apron stage is that it placed the actor right in the midst of the audience instead of keeping him within the picture frame of the proscenium opening. Think for a moment of the effect of this upon the playing. Imagine the comic scenes of "Twelfth Night" performed with the audience on the sides of the players instead of only in front of them. Another thing to be learnt from the Elizabethan stage is the use of a back and a fore-stage alternatively, so that continuity of action may be achieved. But perhaps the most important lesson we can learn is that of simplicity. To all intents and purposes there was no scenery, as we now understand it, on the Elizabethan stage. In the plays of Shakespeare the locale is nearly always indicated in his text—that is to say if it is of any importance to the action of the play. Such asceticism is too severe for us to-day. Partly, I believe, because we are not as sensitive to the descriptive potentialities of verse as were the Elizabethans: for us some indication of the locale is helpful. In this connection

there are two points which should be borne in mind. I can not help feeling that settings should be designed which, although they allow every possible freedom to the conventions used, do somehow or other give a unity to the play as a whole. I doubt whether the Elizabethans worried about this unity, but I believe that we materialistic moderns are helped by it. This is by no means an very easy problem to solve. Suppose that variations upon a permanent structure of three arches are decided upon, it can quite easily occur that, unless great care is used, the background of one or more arches will be too pompous or romantic for a scene whose content is knock-about farce and fooling. The second point. It is far more important that a setting should stress the theatrical background of a locale than attempt realistic reproduction, or even an impression, of same. It is more important that we should, in "Twelfth Night" for instance, be made to feel the mood and atmosphere of Orsino's Court than that we be shown a representation, or even an impression, of a Palace in Illyria. An attempt should be made to express romantic melancholia and dignity rather than 'Palacy' effects: I would prefer a simple square block spotlight to any attempts at copying Bakst gone Baroque.

If the Traditionalists have placed the emphasis on Shakespeare, the Experimentalists have placed the emphasis on the theatre. This influence has, on the whole, been a good one, because it has restored a little 'honest-to-God' theatricality to a stage that had been starved of it by psychology. Constructivism was an attempt, a perverted one perhaps, to help the actor by devising different levels for him to appear on. Now I consider this matter of levels to be important, even in the very simplest of Shakespearean settings. For two reasons: in the first place infinite variety can be given thereby to the most straightforward setting: secondly, and more important, by means of levels the accent is once again upon the actor in Shakespearean playing. It is, however, important to add that these levels must in no way obtrude upon the main action of the play: once they do this, they become a silly affectation. The simplest means of devising different levels is by the use of several small rostra, each about the size of a Tate's sugar box. For some strange reason the mention of the word rostrum seems to produce defeatism and terror.

SHAKESPEAREAN SETTINGS FOR SMALL STAGES

Yet nothing can be simpler than the use of this device. Why, even sugar-boxes arranged with imagination and a feeling for theatrical values, can be made to represent anything from a throne to a country stile.

It is generally accepted that in order to assist in rapid continuity of action the system of front and back stage scenes should be used for Shakespearean production. Excellent results can be obtained by these means, but for me the method is not completely satis-

factory. The difference of emphasis between the front scenes and the back scenes is too strongly marked. I can not help feeling that the real solution of Shakespearean production lies in some development of a permanent setting that remains throughout the play, so that the audience is never worried by the curtain either coming down or going across continuously. This is, I am afraid, outside the scope of the present subject—Shakespearean Settings for Small Stages.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FESTIVAL PLAYS.

18th October, 1935.

DEAR SIR,

At this time of the year many amateur clubs will be searching for a play to do in the Festival. Some help in this may be given by the Dramatic Contest of original short plays, which we are promoting for the ninth time. The plays submitted have been read by Mr. F. Sladen-Smith, who has chosen the best nine, and these will be produced in the actual Contest at the end of this month; in addition to these, there are numerous others which seem well worth consideration. We have accordingly prepared a catalogue, stating, for each play, the author's name and address, number of characters, stage setting, and a brief summary of the action; the plays being arranged in order of merit by Mr. Sladen-Smith himself.

A copy of this will be sent free of charge to any affiliated society on application to the Hon. Secretary (Dramatic Section), Mrs. F. W. Gardner, 4, Windsor Terrace, Clifton, Bristol, 8. A stamp for postage must accompany each application.

Yours faithfully,

C. M. HAINES,

Director of the Contest.

THE CLIFTON ARTS CLUB,

172, Charlotte Street,

Park Street, Bristol, 1.

TOO MUCH "FOREIGN DRAMA"

DEAR SIR,

When I read through the League's Magazine I am astonished, at the amount of space, which is allotted in praise of the Foreign Stage especially the Soviet, that I wonder if we have a British Drama at all. What wonderful people these foreigners are, they do things so much better than we do, at any rate according to Mr. Craig and other writers in the magazine. It seems a pose in these days to laud things that are foreign. Even our towns are being permeated with the foreign touch, witness the ghastly building which Bexhill have erected as their pavilion on the front, designed by architects of foreign extraction.

I suggest the League change their name to the 'International Drama League.'

Yours truly,

A. M. JONES.

TRANSLATIONS.

DEAR SIR,

Mr. Cecil Chisholm in his book "Repertory" laments the fact that Lenormand's plays are not better known in England.

I would like to inform you that the York Settlement Community Players produced this year a translation of his great play "A l'Ombre du Mal" (The Shadow of Evil), and that it was enthusiastically received by press and public. This translation is available for amateur Societies on a percentage basis, and particulars can be obtained from myself.

In December this year, the Y.S.C.P. are producing a new translation of Moliere's "Le Misanthrope," and this will also be available for amateur Societies in January 1936 on the same basis. It is well known that all available translations are either unactable, or they distort the original beyond all recognition. Our translation is close to the original but eminently "Speakable."

Yours faithfully,

EDWARD TAYLOR,

Hon. Secretary.

YORK SETTLEMENT COMMUNITY PLAYERS,

HOLGATE HILL,

YORK.

AN UNEXPECTED SIDELIGHT ON AMATEUR DRAMA.

We have pleasure in printing the following letter to the League's Librarian, from the Oratory School, Caversham, Reading:—

DEAR MISS COATES,

"Thank you very much indeed for sending copies of "Laburnum Grove" at such short notice and for so admirably arranging the rest of this term's plays for me.

It may interest you to know that apart from the pleasure these readings give, they have proved to be of practical value to candidates for the Army Examinations: recently in those papers questions have been asked about plays by most of the authors whose works we have read."

Yours sincerely,

R. RICHINGS.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

"THE TROJAN WOMEN"

PERFORMED BY THE NORTHANTS WOMENS INSTITUTES.

"The Trojan Women" by Euripides, translated by Gilbert Murray. This has been presented by the Drama Committee of the Northants Federation of Women's Institutes, and produced by Mrs. Penelope Wheeler, at Rugby, Northampton and Kettering.

It is an interesting choice. The impression left by the performance was of sincerity and of a very genuine love of the Theatre, and of this play in particular. In spite of the great difficulties of Greek Tragedy, and of its disadvantages for untrained choruses the production was wholly worth while. It was done simply, sincerely, and with sympathy: a very courageous, and (taken as a whole) a successful undertaking.

A play which relies so much on a well drilled chorus to hold the attention of the audience is never an easy play for any company to do. The chorus are on the stage almost throughout, and on their voices, movements and "presence" the continuity of the play depends. Too much of this "presence" during an individual scene would destroy intimacy—too little during their own "keenings" can cause loss of grip, by letting interest drop; on this balance rests the whole play. The movements and grouping of the chorus were good, and they did not intrude into the intimacy of the principals, but their voices collectively lacked push and concentration—they were too often without mettle and were often too slow.

The standard of the principals was, in the main, high, and by their understanding of the verse they took their share in giving inspiration to an audience moved by the beauty of the words and the grandeur of the tragedy.

THEATRE ROYAL YORK

NEW REPERTORY REVIVAL.

One of the most remarkable instances of revival in the interest of the "living" theatre has happened in recent weeks at York. The famous Theatre Royal of that ancient City is the second oldest theatre in England and as such is justly known as "The Historic Theatre." During the last few years conditions have not been at all bright theatrically in York and it was feared that the Theatre Royal would have to close its doors. That great philanthropist Mr. Seebohm Rowntree felt that this would be a terrible catastrophe and consequently interested himself in the theatre. He experimented with a Repertory Season which, for various reasons, proved to be a complete failure. He then visited several of the more happily placed Repertory Theatres in England and in due course extended an invitation to Mr. R. B. Leech, the Coventry accountant, who is so closely connected with the success of the Coventry Repertory Company, to re-organise Repertory at York. In consequence of the re-organisation, which has been modelled on Birmingham, Liverpool and Coventry, success has been achieved in a few short weeks. Since the company opened with "Sweet Aloys" an average of over 10,000 people have visited the theatre each week. When one reflects that the population of York is but 90,000 these are remarkable figures indeed.

THE CRESCENT THEATRE, BIRMINGHAM

The Crescent Theatre is now sufficiently well-known to render detailed description superfluous; but those who have not yet visited Birmingham's first "Little Theatre" may be interested to know that it is now primarily conducted for profit, its avowed policy being to present plays of quality.

The Theatre has been open for three years, and its steadily-increasing membership indicates that it is satisfying a definite demand. To meet this demand the run of each production has now been increased to two weeks.

The Theatre has been entirely re-seated during the vacation; central heating has been installed; the foyer has been enlarged; and other improvements have been effected with a view to the increased comfort of audiences. A leading daily paper recently described the Crescent Theatre as "One of the most delightful 'Little Theatres' in the Country."

The 1935-6 programme includes "Sheppey" by W. Somerset Maugham, "The Witch," "This Woman Business" by Ben W. Levy, "He Who Gets Slapped" by Audreyer, "Supremacy" by T. C. Kemp, and "Biography" by S. M. Behrman.

GUILDFORD REPERTORY COMPANY.

This is a fine effort to establish a Repertory Theatre in Surrey's County Town. "The First Mrs. Fraser," "The Adding Machine" and Mr. Somerset Maugham's "The Breadwinner" have already been produced.

There will follow "Flowers of the Forest," by John Van Druten, on Nov. 15th and 16th, "A Man's House," by John Drinkwater on Nov. 28th, 29th and 30th, and "Tell Her the Truth" a Musical Version of the farce "Nothing But the Truth," on December 13th, 14th, 20th and 21st.

The performances take place at the St. Nicholas Hall, Guildford, and full particulars of membership may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Guildford Repertory Company, St. Nicholas Hall, Guildford.

"TOBIAS AND THE ANGEL" AT ROCHDALE

For the first production of its eleventh season the Curtain Theatre have just presented Mr. James Bridie's play "Tobias and the Angel." The Manchester Guardian in its notice of the play said that The Rochdale Curtain Theatre's production gave every aid to enjoyment of the spectacle, for it was extremely well set, and the designs and costumes were most attractive. The opening scene in Tobit's hovel was a harmony of soft brown and dun and blue, and the garden of Raguel's house was designed in crisp, clear colours.

RECENT RELEASES.

Further important releases by Messrs. Samuel French Ltd., include: "Touch Wood" by C. L. Anthony; "Hyde Park Corner" by Walter Hackett; "The Aunt of England" by Cosmo Hamilton and Anthony Gibbs; and "Laburnum Grove" by J. B. Priestley, but of which play no performance may be given before December 1st, 1935. Messrs. French have issued an acting edition of "Mr. Faithful" by Lord Dunsany, at the price of 2s. 6d. net.

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THE TUDOR WENCH
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